

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## A Biblical look at some of today's ideas: Fundamentalism

Today we come to the end of our four-part series on "A Biblical look at some of today's ideas", and we're going to look at fundamentalism. What do you think when someone uses the word "fundamentalism"? When I hear it used, it's often in a rather negative context, and it tends to portray rigidity, inflexibility, and perhaps even bigotry. But the word itself is derived from the idea of foundations. Now I have deliberately chosen the title "Fundamentalism" because it's a word that's quite often used in the media, and so it is a good way in for us to make us think about foundations. I'm not really interested in labels that might be attached to Christians, whether in a positive or negative sense, but I am interested in the foundations of our faith! So the next time you hear the word fundamentalist being used, well that's a good excuse to start thinking about foundations!

Now it hardly needs to be said that foundations are extremely important! Good foundations are essential for a house or any other building. Problems with foundations can lead to very serious issues like subsidence, and they can be very expensive to fix. The Lord Jesus' parable about the house built on the rock, and the one built on the sand, illustrates this very clearly. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24-27). The Lord took it for granted that His hearers would understand that to build on the sand would be sheer folly, as it would not provide a proper foundation. On the other hand, the house securely founded on the rock would survive even the worst that the weather could throw at it! Now we can see at least two things taught here - firstly, that the superstructure - the walls, doors, roof and so on - they depend on the foundations for their stability, but secondly, that just as there are important foundations for physical objects, there are foundations for life too and spiritual issues.

What are these foundations, these genuinely "fundamental" things? How can we know what is fundamental and what is not? And does it matter? As always, we turn to the Word of God to seek answers to these questions. Now 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" and the first half of Proverbs 30:5 says that "Every word of God is pure" and then Psalm 119:160 tells us that "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgements endures forever." In similar vein, the Lord Jesus tells us that although heaven and earth will pass away, His words will never pass away - He tells us this in Matthew 24:35. So how can we then determine what is fundamental?

Now it's important to realise that we do not divide the Bible into as it were "primary" and "secondary" truths, as if some parts were more important than others. The Scriptures that we've just considered show us that all of Scripture is important. Nevertheless, just as a house has a superstructure that is built on a solid foundation, so there are foundation truths in the Bible. There are truths in the Bible that cannot really be properly understood if we do not have a firm grasp of the foundations. Foundations are mentioned in Ephesians 2:19-22. "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

Perhaps a good way of considering what might be foundational, or fundamental if you like, is to look at the overall message of Scripture as we go through the Bible. Starting right at the beginning, at the very introduction, we read "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (that's Genesis 1:1). We must start with a belief in God. Hebrews 11:6 spells this out clearly: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." The Bible is God's revelation of Himself. We need to understand that there is a God, who made the world and who made us, and so we are responsible to Him. The Apostle Paul takes this up in Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

Moving on slightly, we see how God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and how they fell by listening to the voice of the serpent and so sinned against God (Genesis 3:1-7). Now here is another fundamental truth - the truth that sin entered the world and so we are sinners. Again in Romans, this time in Romans 3:23, the Apostle Paul

declares that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", and Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." If we don't see ourselves as sinners, we will never see our need of a Saviour.

The promise of a Saviour is another fundamental truth. This truth is introduced very early in the Bible. After Adam and Eve had sinned, God spoke to the serpent, and to Eve, and to Adam (Genesis 3:9-19). To the serpent He said that He (that's God) would put enmity between the serpent's seed and the seed of the woman, and that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (you can see this in Genesis 3:15). The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is also the seed of the woman, the Son of Mary, He is that promised Saviour, who bruised the serpent's head. All the way through the Old Testament, we see shadows, types and pictures of the One who would take our place, take our judgement upon Himself, and so deliver us from the curse and judgement. Now we could easily spend a whole radio programme slot looking at these pictures and types but, just as a very brief and incomplete list, think of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the brass serpent lifted up on the pole (Numbers 21:4-9), that the Lord Jesus Himself spoke about to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15, and think about the predictions of the suffering Messiah in Psalm 22 and in Isaiah 53.

Moving on to Genesis 6 we read of the flood, and Noah and the ark that saved him and his family, and this brings in another fundamental truth, which is the holiness of God. God is holy, and He cannot just ignore sin. Genesis 6:5 states that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." God judged this state of affairs with a flood. The Bible teaches us clearly that God is love - and the promise of a Saviour shows us that very clearly - but it also teaches us that God is holy. Hebrews 12:29 says it plainly: "For our God is a consuming fire."

Not long after the history of Noah, we read about the call of Abraham (see Genesis 12). And again this brings in another fundamental truth - that is the sovereign grace of God in choosing men and women for blessing, not because of any moral worth or excellence in themselves, but simply because of His love and for the glory of His grace. Abraham, of course, became a wonderful man of faith, a truly great man of the Bible, but in Joshua 24:2-3 we read the following: "And Joshua said to all the people, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.'" Much later, Stephen related the story of Abraham in Acts 7:1-7. In Acts 7:2 he says, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran". So from these passages I've just read we can see that Abraham was born to a family that served other gods - in other words they were idolaters. The God of glory appeared to him, and called him out. The sovereign grace of God, that depends on God's character, God's ways, and God's glory, and in no way depends on our merit or fitness, that is a foundational truth. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we've been saved, if we know that our sins have been forgiven, it's thanks to God's grace, that is, His altogether undeserved kindness. Once again we listen to the Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

As we go through the Old Testament, we see the history of Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel, and we see God's unflinching love and goodness towards them. An important milestone in that history was the giving of the Law. Now it's crucial for us to understand the purpose of the Law. The Law is *not* there to make us good or righteous. Now that may seem a surprising statement, but it is what the Apostle Paul explains to us in Romans. He says in Romans 7:12, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." Yes, the Law is indeed holy, and it shows us the holiness of God, and what His requirements are. Romans 8:4 indeed speaks of the "righteous requirement of the law". But then in Romans 3:20, Paul says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, because by the law is knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20) Why is this? The law is good, as I have said just now, but *I* am not good. Remember Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The law is good, and shows us what we should do, but we have a sinful nature and, by ourselves, we will never be able to keep the law perfectly and consistently. That is why Paul says that "by the law is knowledge of sin". The law shows us that we have sinned, and that we are sinners. The very fact of having a law telling us to do this and not do that, makes us want to do the opposite. There is nothing wrong with the law, but there is very much wrong with the material that the law operates on.

Now it's worth thinking about this for a minute. It is quite a common thought that, if God exists, He will weigh up our good deeds against our bad ones, and, if we have enough good deeds, that will do for God. A little while ago I read a most interesting book by Floyd Schneider. He had an interesting question in his book - he said something like this: we often ask how many good deeds do we need to get into heaven, but we don't ask how many bad deeds are needed to keep us out. I thought that Floyd Schneider's comment was very thought provoking. We've already considered that God is holy. Just one bad deed would be sufficient to separate us from His presence - the reason is because of the bad deed itself, and also because the bad deed would demonstrate that we have a sinful nature that is capable of bad deeds, and very likely to produce more such things. And of course our own experience shows us that this is true.

But if the Law highlights our inability to reach and maintain God's standard, this is where the good news starts. Romans 8:3-4: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." The law was "weak through the flesh" - that's what I meant when I said that there is nothing wrong with the law, but there is much wrong with the material that it operates on. Our sinful nature, which the Bible refers to as the flesh, cannot and does not want to obey God's law. Romans 8:7-8: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

What the law could not do, God did - He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus. And this is another, vitally important fundamental truth - Jesus our Deliverer. We might well say that everything about our Lord Jesus is foundational. We see these foundational truths as we read through the Gospels in the New Testament. We see first the miraculous way in which He was born as baby, with the virgin Mary as His earthly mother. This is important, because Jesus was made in the *likeness* of sinful flesh - He came as a real Man, a real human, so that He could be our Saviour, but He was not a sinner - He did not inherit the sinful nature from Adam. The Bible is very clear about the manner of His birth. The words of the angel Gabriel to Mary are recorded for us in Luke 1:35, and speaking of Jesus, Gabriel says "that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." The Gospel of John tells us plainly that Jesus is God, and that He was eternally with God before coming to this world as a human baby: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1, 14).

As we read through the Gospels, we see the way in which the Lord Jesus lived. We can see someone who truly fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law. He is One of whom it can be truly said that He loved God with all His heart, and that He loved His neighbour as Himself (see Luke 10:27, Leviticus 19:18). And yet, although the Scripture says of Him that He went about doing good, He was ultimately rejected and condemned to die on a cross, even though the united testimony of His enemies was that He had done nothing wrong. But this was God's plan! Our Lord suffered on the cross for our sins. The purpose of the cross, and the truth of substitution, and the truth of His resurrection, are all fundamental truths - we cannot do without them. The Apostle Paul puts them in a nutshell in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures". Notice that the Apostle Paul says that he received these things - perhaps he was taught these things directly by the Lord, perhaps through the Holy Spirit. And yet these things that he was taught were "according to the Scriptures" - the death and resurrection of the Lord, and the purpose of His death and resurrection, are clearly foretold, and explained in the Scriptures. As you read through the Gospels, make a note of how many times the Lord Jesus did something so that "the Scriptures might be fulfilled". The death and the resurrection of the Lord are truly foundational - Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" But 1 Corinthians 15:20 follows: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

These foundational truths are all highly important, and our eternal security rests on them. Since Christ suffered for our sins, and was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25), it follows that He is the only way to God, to have peace with God, to know that our sins have been forgiven and that our sinful nature has been dealt with. The Lord Jesus Himself says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter says in Acts 4:12, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

What other foundational truths are there? Well, many more could be considered, as we carry on with our overview of the Bible, and there won't be time to cover them all. Indeed, there are probably many that I have missed already, but hopefully this talk is getting the message across that God has revealed to us Himself, and He has revealed His plans, and crucially, His Son, in His Word, the Bible, and that we need to have a good grasp of the overall message of the whole of Scripture, so that we are properly grounded in all of God's foundational truths. The truth that God will judge the world, and that He has committed all judgement to His Son, is yet another of the fundamentals. When the Apostle Paul was defending himself before the Roman governor Felix, it says in Acts 24:25 that Paul "reasoned about righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come", but Felix was afraid and decided to postpone the discussion. It was a great shame that Felix did not continue to listen! Hebrews 9:27 tells us that "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement..." We need to be delivered from that judgement! But Hebrews 9:28 continues, "...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." And this brings us to the last of our fundamental truths for today's message, and that is of Christ's return. We will finish with the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, in Revelation 22:12, 16 and 20: "And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. ... I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. ... Surely I am coming quickly."

So the next time you hear the word "fundamentalist", think instead of foundations and fundamental truths. A well-founded Christian, one who is well grounded in fundamental truths, is prepared to take God at His word as revealed in the Bible. Having accepted God's Son, Jesus Christ, as Saviour, he or she seeks to show forth the love of God in a needy world.

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